# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED CHARTER OF THE CITY OF TROY

#### August 28, 2015

#### INTRODUCTION

The Troy Charter Review Commission, appointed in January to propose updates and improvements of the document that defines the form and function of the City of Troy, New York, has created a new Charter that will go before the city's voters in November of this year.

The Commission is a nine-member, nonpartisan panel of citizens working without financial compensation. Members were appointed by the Mayor and by both major parties represented on the City Council. All of its working sessions have been open to the public.

After numerous such meetings, a series of public hearings, and a monthslong written comment period for City officials and employees and the general public, the Commission created, and approved on August 25 by a 9-0 vote, a final document to be submitted to the Board of Elections to be offered as a ballot question in November.

The proposed modern Charter includes changes that would improve efficiency in delivery of City services, reduce the size of government, and eliminate pages of outdated or redundant material. It has been reformatted to take into account all proposed changes, improve readability, and be gender neutral. A summary of changes follows. However, the public is urged to review the entire document, available online at troyny.gov, the City's website.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Among the proposed changes to the Troy City Charter are:

## • Creation of a Department of General Services.

A department commissioner would oversee a Bureau of Engineering, a Bureau of Traffic Control, a Bureau of Streets, a Bureau of Sanitation, a Bureau of Buildings, a Bureau of Code Enforcement, a Central Garage, and a Bureau of Parks and Recreation. The latter bureau would maintain its own budget line. This realignment will allow for, and encourage, more efficient management of personnel, finances and equipment.

#### • Reduction of the City Council to seven (7) members.

This would have no effect on the six (6) district seats and no effect on term limits. The reduction is reflective of the smaller current population of the City compared to its level when the Council was expanded to nine seats. It would be accomplished by eliminating two of the three current at-large seats before the November 2019 election. The remaining at-large seat would become a directly-elected President of the Council, serving a four-year-term. Each district seat would continue to have a two-year term. The maximum number of consecutive years of service for all Council members would remain at eight (8). By this change, voters gain the opportunity to directly elect their Council President for the first time. And, a four-year term recognizes the current difficulties of running on a citywide basis every 24 months, which the Commission believes to be an onerous one. Setting implementation of these changes for 2019 would allow the election for President of the Council to be put on the same cycle as the election for Mayor.

## • Refining Language On Creation of Positions.

Since the Charter last underwent a major overhaul decades ago, the fiscal picture of the City has drastically changed. There are instances in the current Charter requiring certain appointed positions to be filled. In reality, and in practice, their duties have been absorbed into other positions, been changed by technology, or otherwise affected.

The Commission conferred with numerous City officials, department heads and managers to ascertain what positions are necessary for proper basic operation of the City and what positions are desirable only if they are fiscally supportable.

As a result, the revised language states that some positions "shall" be filled, meaning it is mandatory, while others "may" be filled, which is discretionary.

Some examples of positions that "shall" be filled are the Corporation Counsel, City Comptroller, Registrar of Vital Statistics, City Purchasing Agent, Chief of Police, Chief of Fire, Commissioner of General Services, City Engineer, Superintendent of Public Utilities, and Director of Parks and Recreation.

Some examples of positions that "may" be filled are the Budget Officer, City Treasurer, Commissioner of Public Safety, Traffic Engineer, Supervisor of Streets and Sanitation, Supervisor of Water, and Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development.

#### • Providing for an Independent Redistricting Commission.

The City Council would be required to appoint an unpaid, nonpartisan Commission of seven (7) members to examine federally supplied census information drawn from each 10-year census to ascertain that the population of each of the City's electoral districts complies with proper distribution percentages and pertinent laws. If the Commission determines there is noncompliance, it then would create a proposal to modify district boundaries to come into compliance, which would be voted upon by the City Council. No more than four (4) members of the Commission would be registered members of the same political party. The purpose of this change is to take the mechanics of redistricting out of the hands of the Council in hopes of eliminating the possibility of gerrymandering or other politically motivated actions, while maintaining the Council's responsibility to voters of the City as a whole.

# • Creating Definitions.

A list of terms in the opening section of the new Charter would avoid conflicting interpretations.

# • Redefining Job Qualifications.

The proposed Charter adds, updates and/or enumerates minimum requirements for a variety of professional positions to assure the hiring of the most qualified candidates.

## • Improving Communications.

Provisions would be made throughout the Charter to improve public access to information through wider dissemination of notices, documents and such other items as might occur by use of modern communication methods.

#### • Reducing the Document.

Roughly a third of the current Charter's provisions have been eliminated to reduce duplication and redundancy, and make the document easier to navigate. In other instances, in which a provision mirrors state law, the new Charter would refer to the applicable law rather than retain the current practice of including overly wordy recitations of the particulars. Examples can be found in references to the duties and operation of courts in the City, and the operation of the Municipal Civil Service Commission.